

Fuel 4 Women



KSC/CCAFS HEALTH EDUCATION AND WELLNESS PROGRAM

Women's Mental Health March 2006

INTRODUCTION

As we move through different stages in our lives, we enjoy and cherish happy times as well as face challenges. In fact, many of the things that bring us great joy and fulfillment, such as close relationships, a promotion, having a baby, or buying a home, also can cause stress on our mental health. At some point we also have to cope with traumatic life events such as dealing with a loved one's serious illness or death, a loss of a job, domestic violence or sexual assault. Changes in our physical health also affect our mental health. Changes in the body's hormone levels from pregnancy and childbirth, or from menopause, can cause depression, anxiety, irritability, and tearfulness. Depression also comes along with many illnesses such as cancer, heart disease, stroke, HIV, or autoimmune diseases.

We all feel worried, anxious or sad from time to time. But, a true mental health disorder makes it hard for a woman to function normally. Women suffer twice as often as men by most forms of depression and anxiety disorders, and nine times as often by eating disorders. While there are different mental health disorders, they all are real illnesses that can't be willed or wished away. You aren't at fault if you have one, and you should not suffer in silence. Be patient with yourself and reach out to others for help. These illnesses can be treated successfully so that you can get back to enjoying life - not only for yourself, but for your family too.

WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

This may seem like an obvious question, but actually, the term mental health is multi-faceted. When we talk about our mental health we are referring to both our brain's physical health as well as our emotional state. In order to have good overall mental health, your brain needs to be physically fit as well as emotionally fit. A number of factors contribute to both the physical and emotional state of our minds. It is important be aware of these issues so that you can keep your mind happy on both levels. Factors that influence mental health include, but are not limited to, stress, physical activity, nutrition, and age.

MENTAL DISORDERS AFFECTING WOMEN

Anxiety disorders, depression, and eating disorders affect women more than men, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is important to recognize mental health disorders because there are various treatments available.

Anxiety Disorders

Please see the March 2006 HEWP health packet on anxiety disorders.

Depression

Depression is a serious medical illness; it's not something that you have made up in your head. It's more than just feeling "down in the dumps" or "blue" for a few days. It is feeling "down" and "low" and "hopeless" for weeks at a time.

A depressive disorder is an illness that involves the body, mood, and thoughts. It affects the way a person eats and sleeps, the way one feels about oneself, and the way one thinks about things. A depressive disorder is not the same as a passing blue mood. It is not a sign of personal weakness or a condition that can be willed or wished away. People with a depressive illness cannot merely "pull themselves together" and get better. Without treatment, symptoms can last for weeks, months, or years. Appropriate treatment, however, can help most people who suffer from depression.

Eating Disorders

Anorexia Nervosa

People with anorexia nervosa see themselves as overweight even though they are dangerously thin. The process of eating becomes an obsession. Unusual eating habits develop, such as avoiding food and meals, picking out a few foods and eating these in small quantities, or carefully weighing and portioning food. People with anorexia may repeatedly check their body weight, and many engage in other techniques to control their weight, such as intense and compulsive exercise, or purging by means of vomiting and abuse of laxatives, enemas, and diuretics.

Bulimia Nervosa

Bulimia is characterized by an ongoing cycle of bingeing and purging. This cycle is difficult to break and is often triggered by feelings of depression, boredom, or anger. Bulimics rarely binge or purge in front of others. Instead, they tend to do it in secret, usually when they are alone. Binge-purge episodes can occur a few times a week or numerous times a day, depending upon the severity of the illness. Without treatment, binge-purge sessions usually get worse and will increase in frequency.

Binge-Eating Disorder

People with binge-eating disorder experience frequent episodes of out-of-control eating, with the same binge-eating symptoms as those with bulimia. The main difference is that individuals with binge-eating disorder do not purge their bodies of excess calories. Therefore, many with the disorder are overweight for their age and height. Feelings of self-disgust and shame associated with this illness can lead to bingeing again, creating a cycle of binge eating.

QUICK FACTS

- About 2.3 percent of the U.S. population ages 18 to 54—approximately 3.3 million Americans—has Obsessive Compulsive Disorder in a given year.
- General Anxiety Disorder most often strikes people in childhood or adolescence, but can begin in adulthood, too. It affects women more often than men.
- Major depression is the leading cause of disability in the U.S. and worldwide.
- Nearly twice as many women (12 percent) as men (7 percent) are affected by a depressive disorder each year.



Treatment

PROFESSIONAL HELP

STRESS MANAGEMENT

WAYS TO EXERCISE YOUR MIND

Many of us exercise our bodies to stay fit, but we tend to ignore the fact that our brains need exercise too! Simple mind puzzles like crosswords or word searches, cards, or Trivial Pursuit can keep your mind in tip-top shape. Try reading the newspaper every morning or tuning into the nightly news for a quick mental health treatment. Taking a class, whether it is Shakespeare Appreciation or pottery, can also keep your mind feeling fresh and active. Simple changes like taking up a new hobby or having a conversation with your coworker can also stimulate the brain. Research shows that these mental exercises can help reduce memory loss by up to 50%.

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- ♦ *Educating women about their health*
- ♦ *Encouraging women to act against disease*

HTTP://HEWP.KSC.NASA.GOV

RESOURCES

National Institute of Mental Health
www.nimh.nih.gov

Wendyann R. Wyatt, Employee Assistance Program Administrator
Kennedy Space Center – Occupational Health Facility
321-867-7398

The Life Skills Support Center
1381 South Patrick Drive, Patrick Air Force Base
321-494-8171

Provides family treatment services for military families

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